# Section 1:  A summary of the writing inquiry

*Statement of the Issue*

In 2009 the Colorado Commission on Higher Education released its annual Legislative Report on Remedial Education. The report contained some startling statistics about incoming college students in the fall of 2008 who were in need of remediation: 36.7% of students in 2 year institutions and 8.8% of students in 4 year institutions. In Douglas County and Aurora Public Schools this meant that over 300 of their graduating seniors would require remediation.

Alarmed by these statistics, the superintendents of these two districts, John Barry and James Mitchell, were determined that something needed to be done. Curriculum directors and secondary literacy coordinators (titles are wrong here!) from the two districts rallied to their cry. Together, along with Dr. Stevi Quate, they developed an inquiry project to understand the disconnect between expectations and practices at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Teachers, instructional coaches, and university instructors were invited to join the group to explore this issue.

*Who We Are*

The Denver Area School Superintendent Council (DASSC) Writing Inquiry Group brings together instructional experts from Aurora and Douglas County Public Schools and post-secondary college partners, including instructors and professors from University of Colorado Boulder, University of Colorado Denver, and Aurora Community College. Specifically, our inquiry group includes: [NOTE: The following is not accurate – close but not accurate!)

5 literacy or instructional coaches

7 classroom teachers at the high school level

2 directors

2 coordinators

1 specialist

3 instructors of writing at the post-secondary level

1 director of writing program at the community college level

2 representatives from the education department at the University of Colorado at Denver (1 assistant professor who teaches and researches literacy and 1 senior instructor who teaches English methods)

And….

Dr. Stevi Quate was the facilitator of the inquiry group.

*What did we do?*

Over the course of the 2010/2011 school year we collaborated around writing instruction at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Our group's purpose was to understand what needs to be done in order to ensure students will be successful writers in college. As a means to reach that purpose we focused on the following questions:

* What do high school writing teachers and college professors who teach writing need to know about expectations, curriculum, and instruction?
* What writing dispositions, skills, and knowledge are needed for incoming college students to be successful?
* What does it mean to prepare students as writers for college?

During the 2010-2011 academic year, we met six times: August 19, 2010; September 28, 2010; November 3, 2010; January 31, 2011; February 28, 2011; and May 13, 2011.

Each of our meetings included exploration of topics ranging from the post-secondary writing courses to looking at student work in order to find and annotate exemplars of student writing. Typically, our meetings included gathering insights from panelists or invited guests, discussions of readings that focused on the issue, and small group exploration of relevant issues. Below is a summary of the topics explored over the year:

* The context of UC Boulder’s writing program including requirements the program must meet to be endorsed by the Council of Writing Programs and ways that the program must address the university’s strategic plan (i.e., Flagship 2030); presenter: John Ackerman, director of Program for Writing and Rhetoric.
* Syllabi and course descriptions of writing courses at the secondary level (mostly senior-level writing courses) and at the post-secondary level
* Post-secondary writing instructors’ expectations for writing and typical instructional practices; panelists were from UC Boulder and Aurora Community College
* Writing in content courses at the community college level (a panel discussion and an examination of the CCA Tool Kit which includes writing guidelines for various disciplines)
* First year college students’ perceptions of their preparation for writing in college
* A study co-conducted by Joann Addison, UCD writing professor, that reviewed writing practices at the high school and college level
* Examination of student writing at the secondary and post-secondary level
* Writing in the world of work: an interview with Daniel Nanio from Pickens Technical College
* Examination of the Accuplacer, the test used by community colleges to determine if students need to take a basic (remedial) writing course

*What we read*

At most of our inquiry meetings, we discussed text that was grounded in the research about the disconnect between secondary and post-secondary writing. (All of the articles can be found on our wiki: [writinginquiry@wikispaces.com](mailto:writinginquiry@wikispaces.com).) Below is a list of the articles we studied during year one of our inquiry:

* + What Do Professors Really Say about College Writing? (*English Journal*, January 2011, pgs 75-81)
  + Closing the Gap between High School Writing Instruction and College Writing Expectations (authors: Susan Fanetti, Kathy M. Bashrow, and David L. DeReese, *English Journal* 99.4 2010 77-83)
  + Writing in High School/Writing in College: Research Trends and Future Directions (authors: Joanne Addison and Sharon James McGee, *College Composition and Communication* 62-1, September 2010)
  + Helping Students Cross the Threshold: Implications from a University Writing Assessment (Elizabeth Brockman, Marcy Taylor, MaryAnn Crawford, and Melinda Kreth, *English Journal* 99.3 2010, 42-49)
  + Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing (developed by Council of College Writing Programs, NCTE, and NWP)

We highly recommend that districts read and follow the frameworks that are developed and explained in *Frameworks for Success in Postsecondary Writing.*